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ABSTRACT

A course at the University of Illinois entitled "Shakespeare on Film" is discussed briefly, and an annotated list of Shakespeare films for the classroom teacher is provided in this paper. Thirteen films are listed: three versions of "Hamlet," "Henry V," "Julius Caesar," four versions of "Macbeth," "A Midsummer Night's Dream," "Othello," "Romeo and Juliet," and "The Taming of the Shrew." Each annotation gives the name of the director, major stars, distributor, year of production, and mode (black and white or color). (TS)

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SHAKESPEARE ON FILM IN THE CLASSROOM

Because Shakespeare wrote for the theatre, his plays come to fullest life in performance. Yet students in high school and college rarely see the plays performed. Instead, they labor through a knotty text, coming to know the plays as plots and puns, but getting little sense of the sounds and sights latent in the written words. This is a great loss. Worse, such labor for small rewards often leads students to distrust their teacher's enthusiasms, and to dislike Shakespeare. This experience, or one very like it, prejudices many students before they enter Shakespeare classes at the University of Illinois. To overcome this problem, inherent in teaching all drama, we have found a partial solution in Shakespeare on film. Each term the Shakespeare Film Series shows about a dozen films, which form the core of my course "Shakespeare on Film" (English 205 F_1), and which supplement a wide range of courses in Shakespeare, film, and theatre. Although helpful, films raise problems, both practical and pedagogical, which have prevented them from receiving the wide use they deserve. By way of a guide, I wish first to outline the practical difficulties of using films to teach Shakespeare, and then to examine briefly the films I have found most instructive.

Unlike books, which one may purchase and keep, films are controlled by distributors who rent copies at rates determined by the nature of the showing, and this arrangement presents some practical difficulties. To qualify for non-theatrical, classroom rates (usually $50 to $100 per film), no admission may be charged, nor, to protect commercial cinemas, may the film be advertised in any way. Each 16 mm. film is sent special delivery (air mail), insured for $200, thus adding about $5 to the rental price. Because film distributors have a limited number of prints, one must order (by telephone, with written confirmation following) well in advance of showdate to be sure the film will be available.

How may films be integrated into a course in Shakespeare? The answer will vary, of course, with the needs and interests of each course. In my course, a general introduction to Shakespeare, we study about a dozen plays

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per term, about one a week, with some plays being studied in several film versions. The plays are always read and discussed before they are seen on film. In a course in which fewer plays were studied, one might show a film of the play first, then study the text, and then return to the same film (or another of the same play) for a re-evaluation. Indeed, one might structure a semester's work around the different interpretations of the play offered by three different films--say Hamlet by Olivier, Kozintsev, and Richardson. The possibilities for good teaching are myriad.

More important than the mechanics of the course, are the broad questions which arise when film is the performance medium for plays designed for Elizabethan theatre. How does the selective eye of the camera interact with the equally selective imagery of the poetic text? How does the play change when film portrays what Shakespeare's actors on their bare stage described? To what extent can one cut the text legitimately in recognition of these different properties of the two media, one visual, the other verbal? And, ultimately, how true are the interpretations of individual plays embodied in the films? To be sure, there are no final answers to such questions, for they possess an interpretative richness which makes the plays on film a delight to teach. Yet different films permit one to focus on different issues. One must select the films, and thereby the issues that suit one's course. Because previewing is practically impossible, a guide to the films is necessary to choose those appropriate to specific classroom needs. Below, along with rental information I give a thumbnail sketch of each major Shakespeare film.

HAMLET d. Laurence Olivier, s. Olvier, Jean Simmons, Basil Sidney, Eileen Herlie. B/W. 1948. United Films, 1122 S. Cheyenne, Tulsa, Ok. 74119. Olivier's film is justly famous. It won five Oscars and the Venice Film Festival Award. As Olivier's voice announces at the opening, he has chosen to interpret the play as "the tragedy of a man who could not make up his mind." What might sound like a rather conservative, even Romantic interpretation of the play does not, however reveal itself to be so.

The ghost pulsates in and out of focus to the pounding beat of Hamlet's heart. The action unfolds in a castle that camerawork renders a

weird labyrinth of tunnels, alcoves, and stairways. Gertrude is much closer in age to Hamlet than one expects--and his jealousy of his uncle takes on strange colors. Music underscores the movement with a series of leitmotifs for each character. And locale is given symbolic overtones. The tower to which the Ghost leads Hamlet he returns to when contemplating suicide, and there he is finally laid to rest by Fortinbras's men.

This interpretation is provacative, as any must be, and critics have found much to their dislike. Olivier's shrunken text, his mannered acting, his dabbling in Freudian symbolism--all these have raised their ire. Yet all have precedents on the stage and some, we find now, are antecedents of similar speculation by critics and scholars, among them Dover Wilson and Wilson Knight, to name the most famous.

HAMLET, d. Grigori Kozintsev, B/W. 1964. United Artists, UA Sixteen, 759 Seventh Avenue, New York, New York 10022. Russian speech, with subtitles from the Bad Quarto Hamlet, make this a difficult Hamlet for those who do not know the play well. For those who do, it is a fascinating exploration of the play's imagery through recurrent visual symbols. In his Diaries, Kozintsev himself describes the environment his film eloquently portrays: "The architecture of Elsinore does not consist in walls, but in the ears which the walls have. There are doors, the better to eavesdrop behind, windows, the better to spy from. The walls are made up of guards. Every sound gives birth to echoes, repercussions, whispers, rustling. . . . I have in mind stone, iron, fire, earth, and sea. Stone: the walls of Elsinore, the firmly built government prison, on which armorial bearings and sinister bas-reliefs had been carved centuries ago. Iron: weapons, the inhuman forces of oppression, the ugly steel faces of war. Fire: anxiety, revolt, movement, the trembling flame of the candles at Claudius's celebrations; raging fiery tongues; the windblown lamps on the stage erected for 'The Mousetrap.' Sea: waves, crashing against the bastions, ceaseless movement, the change of the tides, the boiling of chaos, and again the silent, endless surface of glass. Earth: the world beyond Elsinore, amid stones--a bit of field tilled by a ploughman, the sand pouring out of Yorick's skull, and the handfull of dust in the palm of the wanderer-heir

to the throne of Denmark." (G.K., Shakespeare: Time and Conscience, London: 1967, 225, 266).

HAMLET. d. Tony Richardson, s. Nicol Williamson, Marianne Faithfull. Color. 1969. Visual Aides Service, University of Illinois, 1325 S. Oak, Champaign, Ill. 61820. Richardson's Hamlet is easily the most exciting and most approachable version of the play on film. Rich costumes delight the eye. Swift-paced camerawork, nearly always in closeup, keep the point of view fluid, so that, as in the nunnery scene, we keep moving around Hamlet. There, we first see Ophelia through Hamlet's eyes as she lies in dishabille on a hammock, and then, abruptly shifting, we look through the eyes of Polonius and Claudius, who stand behind a tapestry peering at the couple. Although point of view changes, characterizations are clear-cut: Hamlet, a post-graduate student, finds himself called away from his studies. Horatio is donnish. Ophelia, played by Marianne Faithfull of Rolling Stones fame, is a wanton--she laughs when her brother speaks of her "chaste treasure" and she is all the more hurt by Hamlet's rejection because she has already accepted him as a lover. Claudius is a bloat debauchee, a mighty drinker before the Lord--but short on the cunning we usually attribute to him. For cunning, Richardson gives us a shrewd Polonius. Despite warrant in the text for what Richardson does, many critics felt that, as Williamson's rough twang betrayed the verse to reach emotions within it, Richardson betrayed the play to make a stunning, anti-heroic film.

HENRY V. d. Laurence Olivier, s. Olivier, Harcourt Williams. B/W. 1944. United Films (address as above). Made in the blood, sweat, and tears of World War II, Olivier's film bears the marks of its origins, and this dates it--a dating which is by no means disadvantageous. Its nationalistic fervor makes the great St. Crispin's speech ring all the louder when one thinks of the troops who hit the beaches at Normandy. The French, effeminate to the point of inanity, are best understood as reflecting the weakness of Vichy leaders. So too, Bardolph, Pistol, Captains Jamie, MacMorris, and Fluellen, and the common soldiers are homespun British types full of barracks humor and sentimentality. While extremely effective for the film's first audience, these characterizations are not always comfortable for those

who remember Vietnam, and the film therefore may be hard to teach.

While not easy, it is nonetheless interesting, however, because Olivier uses different settings for the action. Beginning with a replica of the Globe staging for the first act, afterwards the scenery becomes surrealistic, with decor reminiscent of medieval illuminated manuscripts, and then, changing again for the battle of Agincourt, it becomes realistic, with the vasty fields of France rendered literally in a long tracking shot in which we see the French warriors, seemingly invincible in heavy armor, galloping towards the English bowmen. Later, locale shifts back again, to view the aftermath of the war in a surreal winter landscape, Pistol eating Fluellen's leek and stealing chickens, and Harry courting Kate in the arabesque, picture-book palace. In the end, setting shifts yet again, to our surprise, as the applause and shouts begin, to show the player king and his player queen on the wooden boards of the Globe.

JULIUS CAESAR, d. Joseph Mankiewicz, s. Marlon Brando, John Gielgud, James Mason. B/W. 1953. Films Incorporated, 4420 Oakton Street, Skokie, Il. 60076. Mankiewicz's Julius Caesar extends the traditions of "Shakespeare illustrated" from the realism of the theatre to the realism of the film. In settings familiar through Hollywood epics like Spartacus and Ben-Hur, the play unfolds, somewhat abbreviated in text and extended in action. Marlon Brando's Marc Antony, his muscled body oiled for the race when we first see him, turns out to be far less noble than the Antony who courts Cleopatra. This is largely because Brando is uncomfortable with eloquence. In his eulogy to Caesar, played in marmoreal settings with thousands shouting encouragement, he conceals from them a cynical smirk which he lets the camera see. Gielgud's Cassius, on the other hand, is stagey. And James Mason's Brutus seems more naive than noble. In the battle scenes at the end, the director "opens out" the play, so that we see Brutus' army march to its death up a canyon ringed by the bloodthirsty hordes of Antony and Octavius. The ironies and confusions of the last act are pushed aside to make room for this spectacle, and we realize quite clearly why Shakespeare kept his battles offstage. Overall, the film is useful for teaching because its errors and virtues are obvious.

MACBETH. d. Orson Welles. s. Welles, Roddy McDowall, Jeannette Nolan. B/W. 1948. Audio-Brandon Films, 34 MacQuestin Blvd. South, Mount Vernon, N.Y. 10550. Welle's Macbeth is an adaptation of Shakespeare's play--not the play itself. Welles not only added the priest as a symbol of the "Christian law and order" which opposed Macbeth, he also cut the text a good deal and then rearranged scenes. He even interpolated lines from other Shakespeare plays. All of this was outrageous. Yet Welles was not wholly false to Shakespeare's play. There is of course a sense in which Macbeth is leagued with the infernal against the holy supernatural of Malcolm and the saintly King Edward. And, one might argue further in Welles's defense, the rearrangement of the text was common enough practice in Shakespeare's own time--indeed the Folio text seems to represent some such rearrangement. The ultimate value of the film, however, lies in its ability to stimulate fresh interpretation of the play as we have it. In this way, although avowedly experimental, it may teach us, as do even these experiments which are failures, for we may still learn from their mistakes.

MACBETH. d. George Schaefer, s. Maurice Evans and Judith Anderson. Color. 1960. Audio-Brandon Films (address as above). Schaefer's Macbeth is a curious amalgam of things good and bad. It was made for the Hallmark Hall of Fame television series, with the hope of a second audience in the cinemas. As a result, camera shots are usually close-up or midrange and the colors seem to have been chosen as much for their ability to translate well into black-and-white as for their aptness to the play's themes. Macbeth's "so fair and foul a day", for instance, is spoken against picture-postcard Scots scenery, blue skies and furse-covered hills. Just as the camera technique is hybrid, so is the acting. Maurice Evans and Judith Anderson, both somewhat declined into the vale of years, are not well served by a camera which brings the audience so close that the large gestures of the stage seem overdone, often ludicrous. While Judith Anderson is suitably haggish and venomous, Evans, with a moist eye and a cheerful, well-fed face, in no way suggests the secretest man of blood. His hallucinations,done with double exposure, seem no visitations from the otherworld, but merely the wine-soaked dreams of an aging dypsomaniac. As with Mankiewicz's Julius Caesar, it is a film which teaches well because it invites students to be critical, and rewards their efforts with a fresh understanding of Shakespeare's Macbeth.

THRONE OF BLOOD. d. Akira Kurosawa. B/W. 1957. Audio-Brandon Films (address as above). The cast is Japanese, as is the text (with English subtitles). Kumonosu-Djo, properly translated "The Castle of the Spider's Web," is Kurosawa's transmutation of Shakespeare's Macbeth. Many have written of it as one of the finest Shakespearean films made--despite the fact that the text is not Shakespeare's. Their judgment stems from Kurosawa's success in giving the imaginative essence of Shakespeare's play, transposed into a different culture and seen through a different medium. Shakespeare's Scotland becomes Japan in its feudal period. The primitive emotions of his Thanes find expression in the stylized postures and gestures of the classical Noh drama. Yet the pace and action of the original conception remain. Japanese formality gives an impact to the breaking of ceremony in the banquet scene that has the force of the original. If there were ever a case to be made for the "subtext" of a Shakespearean play, this film must be the example which most clearly illustrates it. Even things which editors have argued were once part of Shakespeare's play--such as the horses seen by Simon Forman but excluded from the Folio text--will be seen in Kurosawa's interpretation.

Thus, for the classroom, it poses in extreme form the questions of authenticity and adaptation which must enter all discussions of filmed Shakespear. And because it is the play without the words, it provides a conceptual model for study of Macbeth's non-verbal dimension--the actions, sights, and sounds which come to life only in performance.

MACBETH. d. Roman Polanski, s. Jon Finch, Francesca Annis. Color. 1971. Columbia Cinematheque, 711 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10022. Even before it came out, Polanski's Macbeth suffered from bad publicity. The Sharon Tate murders led newspapers to see the film's gory violence as Polanski's exorcism of his private devils. And Hugh Hefner's Playboy logo, to say nothing of his pre-release puffs, had papers quipping about "Lady MacBuff." Such distractions aside, it is an interesting interpretation of Macbeth. The de-romanticized medieval Scotland is a tribal society, haunted by Druidic cults, its mores governed by blood guilt, and its warriors by blood lust, in every way closer to what Scotland meant to Shakespeare's audience than to what it has meant to audiences since Walter Scott and Robert Burns. All this is to the good, and it supports Polanski's manipu-

lation of the text and plot to suggest a repeating pattern of murder and violence, a reading underlined by the glimpse at the end of the film of lame Donalbain slouching towards the Witches' cairn.

Yet there is a vacuum at the film's center, for the young actors Jon Finch and Francesca Annis are simply too callow to convey the great emotions which shake the Macbeths. Finch, who does the great soliloquies mainly voice over unspeaking lips, seems plagued with migraine headaches, not a mind full of scorpions, and Francesca Annis snivels her way through her chastisement of Macbeth, omitting, perhaps in deference to Hefner's interests, references to woman's breasts and nursing babes. Overall, a stimulating film, sophisticated in its execution, and, despite flaws, everywhere interesting.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM. d. Peter Hall. s. Ian Richardson, Ian Holm, Diana Rigg, and others from the Royal Shakespeare Company. Color. 1969. Audio-Brandon (address as above). Hall's Dream is probably the best acted Shakespeare film. Derived from productions at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1959 and 1963, it seeks to transform a successful stage interpretation into a successful film--not by filming the actors onstage, but by seeking a new cinematic idiom for poetic drama. The results are wonderful for those who place Shakespeare first, and less than wonderful for those who expect films to be films. The handheld camera and closeup shots with which Hall focuses on the speakers--the better to direct our attention to the poetry they speak --these techniques remind us of television documentary, and at times they may make the speakers appear laughable, especially when they speak directly to the camera. Equally distracting can be the Carnaby-street outfits (miniskirts for the girls, a leather outfit for Hippolyta), the naked fairies, and the heavily accented speech of the workingmen. Yet these "faults" follow lines of interpretation clearly drawn by Shakespeare. The laughable, self-parodying lovers are a fit rendering of the adolescents in the play--albeit an anti-romantic one. The naked fairies are much closer to Shakespeare's wood demons than the creatures of gauze and tinsel from Mendelssohn's era. And, if the rough speech of British workingmen falls at first harshly on American ears, it is perhaps no more so than it was upon the ears of upper class Englishmen. Ian Richardson's Oberon, whose voice makes the verse resonate, is everywhere the vexed, powerful English Pan, assisted by Ian Holm as Puck, equally adept at verse, who literally sniffs out the lovers

in the forest. Diana Rigg is ripe for love, as are the other teenagers, full of the right words but awkward in the execution of the ardor the words bespeak. The workingmen, led by Paul Hardwick as Bottom, are played nearly straight, as bumbling, well meaning laborers who aim to please, yet are none too certain that they will. Once the film's special conventions are accepted, it is a delight to see and teach.

OTHELLO. d. Stuart Burge. s. Olivier, Maggie Smith, Frank Finlay. Color. 1965. Warner Brothers, Non-Theatrical Division, 4000 Warner Blvd. Burbank, Cal. 91505. With minimal concessions to the film Olivier's Othello records the National Theatre production of the play. Although camera angles change, the action is played on a full stage set, and the result is a curious mutation. One is overwhelmed at times by the power of Olivier's acting at close range, his broadlipped, languid smile, his rolling sailor's gait, and his passions pulsing, like the great vein in his forehead, just beneath the skin. But we rarely forget that it is the three-sided stage on which all action takes place. Just as the camera cannot fail to see the smudges of blackface on Maggie Smith as she lies limp and dead in Othello's arms, it cannot fail to remind us, by a thousand such minute distractions, that a film of a stage play is a contradiction in terms. As a film of Othello, it is overlong and at times even awkward. As a record of a treat performance, it is nonpareil, making just enough concession to the demands of the camera. Advanced students will find much to ponder.

ROMEO AND JULIET. d. Renato Castellani. s. Laurence Harvey, Susan Shentall. Color. 1954. United Films (address as above). Castellani anticipates Franco Zeffirelli's successful Romeo and Juliet (1968) in his attention to realistic background detail. Both directors extensively adapted Shakespeare's text, playing down the cynicism of Mercutio, playing up the romantic melodrama of the lovers. Where does adaptation become outright revision? Castellani's attention to fifteenth-century Italian decor, his insistently naturalistic acting, and his irreverent pruning of the text are enough to make scholars blanch--yet the film made movie critics applaud, winning the Grand Prix de Venice when it came out in 1954. Castellani obscures parts of the text, but, as if questing for the fabled "subtext", at times he does so only to reveal in vivid pictorial form the emotions which lie beneath the formal poetic surface, revivifying through film techniques the play's rhetoric, lively for Shakespeare's first audience

and for those of us who have learned to like it, but sadly dead for most twentieth-century audiences. As with an eighteenth-century adaptation for the neoclassical stage, what is interesting is not only what the director has done to Shakespeare, but how Shakespeare comes to new life.

THE TAMING OF THE SHREW. d. Franco Zeffirelli. s. Richard Burton, Elizabeth Taylor. Color. 1966. Columbia Cinematheque (address as above). Zeffirelli's Shrew raises the same questions of adaptation which his Romeo and Juliet and Castellani's does, because all three use the same approach: lavish Italianate backgrounds, a text trimmed and translated into pictorial actions, and a focus on the central love interest at the expense of subplot. In this case, Burton and Taylor take over as Petruchio and Kate, thereby excluding Christopher Sly and his Induction, and obscuring the importance of Bianca and the other suitors. Yet, as an introduction to Shakespeare, the film succeeds. Burton and Taylor are wonderfully type-cast, Burton savoring every bawdy innuendo--especially his rascally crack "What, my tongue in your tail, Kate?"--and Taylor vacillating between virago and vixen, by turns inflamed with outrage at the way men treat her, then, as when she peers at Burton through the peep-hole in the shutters, fascinated by the man with the spirit to match hers. The final banquet scene, in which the errant wives are chastised by the reformed Kate is a masterpiece of irony. From what we have seen before, we are sure that she cannot mean all that male chauvinism she mouths, but what does she mean? It is at once an assertion of the alliance by which she and Petruchio will make the world their apple, and a sly, wily realization that by playing the losing game, she is the ultimate victor. In ways perhaps unforeseen by Shakespeare, the issues are very contemporary, and the film always provokes interesting discussions of the play.

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Of course this survey, which might easily be extended, cannot be definitive. Films may change over from one distributor to another; they may be withdrawn from circulation; or they may be newly released. Distributors' catalogues, sent on request, provide up-to-date facts on rentals. Further information on these and other films appears in the filmography of Charles Eckert's Focus on Shakespeare Films, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: 1973, 165-78, a book which collects critical essays on the films. The reader

may also wish to consult Peter Morris's Shakespeare on Film, Canadian Film Institute, Ottawa: 1964; Roger Manvell's Shakespeare and the Film, Praeger, New York: 1971; and "Shakespeare on Film," a collection of articles in Literature/Film Quarterly, I, Winter, 1973 (Salisbury State College, Salisbury, MD 21801). And readers living nearby may wish to attend the Shakespeare Film Series at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. For a schedule and information, write Shakespeare Film Series, Department of English, University of Illinois, Urbana, IL 61801.